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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [UN](#) [CM](#)
SUBJECT: CAMEROON: BIYA PROMISES PROGRESS ON CORRUPTION AND GOVERNANCE

REF: A. YAOUNDE 784
[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 758
[1](#)C. YAOUNDE 546
[1](#)D. 07 YAOUNDE 1235

Classified By: Ambassador Janet E. Garvey for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In a jovial August 7 conversation with the Ambassador, President Biya said he planned to set up three key government institutions--an elections agency, the Senate, and the Constitutional Court--before the end of the year. Applauding USG efforts to fight corruption in Cameroon, Biya welcomed the Ambassador's input on members of his cabinet and indicated he will likely fire his Defense Minister in the coming weeks. Biya was effusive in his appreciation of US assistance to Cameroon and praise for President Bush, whom he hopes to meet at the UN General Assembly. We have learned from previous broken timelines to take Biya's promises with a grain of salt, but he continues to impress us as more progressive and results-oriented than those who surround him. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador Garvey met with President Biya on August 7 for a wide-ranging 90 minute discussion, half of which focused on the Bakassi Peninsula (ref a). Biya professed envy that the Ambassador had been traveling extensively throughout Cameroon, saying that he wished he could travel outside of Yaounde. In excellent spirits and apparently good health, Biya was jovial and effusive in his praise for POTUS. Biya said he hoped to meet POTUS during the UN General Assembly, which Biya plans to attend.

Corruption and Proclamation 7750

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador briefed Biya on Proclamation 7750, casting the USG's intentions as congruent with Biya's stated goals to fight corruption in Cameroon. Biya welcomed the initiative and pointed out that the Cameroonian street is clamoring for pilfered funds to be repatriated to Cameroon. Ambassador reiterated the USG's eagerness to help identify corrupt proceeds overseas, but emphasized the need to handle such a process through normal legal channels. Biya agreed that the Government of Cameroon (GRC) had wasted time and money working with Dooh Collins (ref d) and promised to press Justice Minister Amadou Ali to bring his anti-corruption efforts into closer alignment with Cameroon's National Agency for Financial Investigations (known by its French acronym, ANIF) and the judicial processes of partner countries.

Reviewing the Cabinet

[1](#)4. (C) In a discussion of his cabinet, Biya shared the Ambassador's positive assessments of Forest Minister Elvis Ngolle Ngolle and Lands Minister Pascal Anong Adibime and took note of the Ambassador's favorable experiences with Finance Minister Essimi Menye, Energy Minister Sindeu and Secretary of State for Mines Fuh. Admiring Ephraim Inoni's

energy and performance as Prime Minister, Biya worried that Inoni might be weakened by allegations that Inoni had profited from the Albatross corruption scandal (ref c). Biya said he was convinced Inoni was not directly implicated, but worried that Inoni would be considered guilty by association, since the scandal happened while Inoni was the Deputy Secretary General at the Presidency. Biya said he had been disheartened to learn that Jerome Mendouga, Cameroon's Ambassador to the U.S., had been so deeply implicated in the scandal. Acknowledging that his cabinet (with more than sixty ministers) was too large and unweildy, Biya said he felt constrained by the need to mollify Cameroon's many tribal groupings. Biya seemed unimpressed with Jean Nkuete, his Minister for Agriculture, and expressed outright hostility to Minister Delegate for Defense Remy Ze Meka. Saying Ze Meka was "completely corrupt" to the point of weakening Cameroon's military (ref a), Biya said he could not fire him before the August 14 handover of the Bakassi Peninsula but seemed eager to do so as soon as possible thereafter.

Positive on US Investment

15. (C) Biya was still beaming from his July 24 meeting with AES CEO Paul Hanrahan (ref b) and hailed the growth of American investment in Cameroon, mentioning specifically the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and GEOVIC, the Colorado-based project to exploit cobalt resources in the East Province. Biya said Cameroon is specifically interested in attracting US investment.

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Press and Politics

16. (C) Acknowledging the need for a free press, Biya nonetheless denigrated Cameroon's media saying, "they write things that are untrue and publish stories in exchange for money," and complained that a free press needs to be more "responsible." Biya lamented the profusion of political parties, complaining that most of them were simply facades, but singled out Bernard Muna, who had split from the main opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) party, as an opposition leader he regards. Biya displayed a keen interest in the American Presidential election (going so far as to offer a cheeky suggestion that President Bush amend the constitution to allow for a third term) and was current on recent events in the campaign.

Three Goals for 2009

17. (C) Biya said electoral agency ELECAM would be set up within months, explaining the delay was to adjust some of the names proposed by Inoni (whose list, Biya said, was filled with "guys older than I am"). Biya emphasized repeatedly that he wanted ELECAM to be truly independent and admitted that Cameroon's anti-corruption agency, CONAC, had suffered from lack of funding, a problem he intended to resolve. Once ELECAM is established, Biya said, he would move to set up the Senate and Constitutional Council as called for in a 1996 round of amendments to the Constitution. Biya said he wanted these institutions functioning by 2010 in order to prepare for presidential elections in 2011. As in previous conversations, Biya demurred from sharing his plans for 2011, hedging, "I am not even sure if I will still be here." As to his own plans, however, Biya said the USG had always been a friend and so, he promised, "I will not do anything without letting the USG know first."

Comment: Biya Going Strong, But Where To?

18. (C) Despite his apparent worry that Cameroon was not

prepared to integrate Bakassi (ref a) and frustrations over corruption and poor governance in his cabinet and within the Presidency, Biya was up-beat, well-prepared, charming, and engaged throughout the 90 minute conversation. He eagerly welcomed the Ambassador's views, even on delicate subjects, and is effusive in his appreciation of US engagement in Cameroon. We have learned from previous broken timelines to take Biya's promises with a grain of salt, but he continues to impress us as more progressive and results-oriented than those who surround him. A meeting with POTUS on the margins of UNGA could provide an opportunity to thank Biya for his unwavering pro-American stance on many important issues (especially the Iraq war and investment in Cameroon) and encourage him to push forward with political and economic liberalization.

GARVEY